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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 10 November 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Semakula Kiwanuka ..... (Uganda)

Contents

Agenda item 86: Effects of Atomic Radiation

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00-22517 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 86: Effects of atomic radiation (A/54/56, A/C.4/54/L.20)

1. **Ms. Uddenberg** (Sweden) said that, since the Director General of the Swedish Radiation Institute currently chaired the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, Sweden therefore had the honour to introduce the report of the forty-eighth session of the Scientific Committee (A/54/46), as well as the draft resolution on the effects of atomic radiation (A/C.4/54/L.20).

2. The Scientific Committee was the major international body which reviewed the exposure of the world population and the atmosphere to all sources of radiation. The levels varied with time and from one place to another, which required their frequent re-evaluation. The method of operation of the Scientific Committee during its 43 years of existence and the quality of its reports had made an inestimable contribution to the work of international bodies and organizations concerned with the effects of radiation. In the past year, the General Assembly had discussed the mandate, the functions and the programme of work of the Scientific Committee in the light of recommendations from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) and had decided, in resolution 53/44, to maintain the present functions and independent role of the Scientific Committee, including the present reporting arrangements.

3. In 1995, the Scientific Committee had begun a new programme of review of the sources, exposure and biological effects of ionizing radiation. At its forty-eighth session in April 1999, the Committee had analysed recent information on those topics. A comprehensive report with detailed scientific annexes would be published in the year 2000. Further understanding of the mechanisms of cellular damage, response to radiation and the biological effects in organisms would assist in establishing the risks of radiation exposure.

4. Introducing draft resolution A/C.4/54/L.20, she announced that Indonesia and Belarus had become co-sponsors. The text largely followed that of resolution 53/54, and it was hoped that, as in previous years, it would be adopted by consensus.

5. **Mr. Pietikäinen** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, whose members were co-sponsoring the draft resolution before the Committee, announced that the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area, Norway, aligned themselves with his statement.

6. The Scientific Committee was the primary international authority on the subject, and in many instances its reports and publications had served as a basis for the setting up of national and international standards for the protection of the population against harmful effects of radiation. The European Union was looking forward to the publication of the Scientific Committee's report in the year 2000, which would be a comprehensive review of the effects of natural, man-made and medical radiation and would represent the level of knowledge at the end of the millennium.

7. The European Union expressed appreciation for the cooperation between the Scientific Committee and other international organizations, particularly WHO, IAEA, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Commission on Radiological Protection, the International Agency for Research on Cancer and the International Commission on Radiation Units and Measurements. The European Union trusted that the Committee would continue its valuable work and assured it once again of its full support.

8. **Ms. Dong Guilan** (China) drew attention to the results of the forty-eighth session of the Scientific Committee contained in the report introduced (A/54/46) and welcomed the selection of important topics for in-depth study, as well as the envisaged comprehensive report on all issues relating to radiation sources and effects that was to be submitted to the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. Since its founding in 1955, the Scientific Committee had done valuable work, taking a scientific and independent approach, which had served as a basis for the adoption of important decisions and contributed to the protection of the environment and human health.

9. The Chinese Government followed a unified policy for environment and development and had adopted effective measures to protect the environment and the people's health at the same time. China

maintained a good cooperative relationship with the Scientific Committee, whose publications had increased China's understanding of atomic radiation and its effects and had permitted research and protection work in that area. Assessment criteria and methods of inspection for optimized application of radiation protection in nuclear plants had been incorporated in the national programme of key technologies and research and development projects, and China's national standards on protection against radiation would be published soon.

10. China would continue to give its full support to the Scientific Committee's activities and hoped that all Member States would make full use of scientific and technological achievements for the protection of the environment and the health of their peoples.

11. **Mr. Soeriaatmadjz** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), drew attention to the valuable work done by the Scientific Committee over more than four decades in the dissemination of information on the risks to health and the environment of exposure to radiation. ASEAN welcomed the report of the Scientific Committee and its graphic depiction of the relative magnitude of radiation exposures from various sources, as well as its consideration of recent information on sources of radiation.

12. The question of peaceful uses of nuclear energy was of particular importance to the developing countries, whose power sources were limited. Unfortunately, it must be recognized that world spending on the development of destructive capability far outweighed investments in peaceful uses. The developed countries should extend all possible assistance to the developing countries in order to enable them to use nuclear for the betterment of their peoples.

13. Being aware of the risks of the use of nuclear energy, ASEAN recognized the importance of the strict observance of safety standards for the protection of the environment and human health. That called for information-sharing on deficiencies in the operation of nuclear power plants and the implementation of measures to ensure safety. In that regard, ASEAN hoped that the Scientific Committee and IAEA would play complementary roles. Another issue of concern to ASEAN was the potential harm inherent in the maritime transport of radioactive materials and wastes, and it therefore called for the maintenance of a high level of safety in that regard and the observance of specific guidelines.

14. In view of the dangers posed to the security and even the survival of mankind by a large-scale nuclear accident or the deliberate use of nuclear weapons, it was unacceptable that the nuclear-weapon States refused to embark on a phased approached for the total abolishment of nuclear armaments. ASEAN supported all efforts to that end in compliance with the provisions of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

15. In the ASEAN region, the 1997 Bangkok Treaty, which had created the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, was an important contribution towards the objective of achieving a world entirely free of nuclear weapons, without prejudice to the right of the States parties to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, in particular for their economic and social development. In that context, he called on the nuclear-weapon States to accede to the Protocol of the Bangkok Treaty, which would ensure a stable and secure milieu, politically and environmentally, for the peoples. ASEAN reaffirmed its full support for the important work of the Scientific Committee and looked forward to the publication of its comprehensive report on all issues relating to atomic radiation.

16. **Mr. Yoshikawa** (Japan) stressed the great importance which his Government attached to the activities of the Scientific Committee, whose reports enabled the international scientific community and Governments to assess accurately the effects of radiation on human beings and the environment. Japan fully supported the activities of the Committee and expressed satisfaction at the cooperative relationship which the Committee maintained with other competent international organizations, including IAEA, WHO, ILO, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Japan was a sponsor of draft resolution A/C.4/54/L.20 because it was convinced that the Scientific Committee's activities of collecting, structuring and disseminating radiological information was essential to a world that was increasingly reliant on nuclear technology. His delegation hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

17. On 30 September 1999, an accident had occurred at a nuclear fuel plant in Tokaimura. That had been the first nuclear criticality accident to occur in Japan, and his Government wished to express its gratitude to those States and intergovernmental organizations that had expressed concern in the wake of that regrettable accident. Japan had been providing detailed information concerning the accident to the international community and the relevant international organizations, and he would therefore refrain from giving details at the current meeting. However, it should be stressed that the radiation level outside the Tokaimura plant had returned to normal since the criticality had ended and after shielding had been employed. Agricultural products and livestock, as well as the environment, including air and water in the area, had been declared to be completely safe. By the end of the current year, an accident investigation committee, established by the Nuclear Safety Commission of Japan, was expected to submit its final report on the investigation into the cause of the accident and on measures to be taken to prevent similar accidents in the future. On the basis of the conclusions of that investigation, the Government of Japan was determined to take every necessary measure to guarantee the safety of the nuclear cycle as a whole. Meanwhile, Japan would continue to provide relevant information to international organizations, including the scientific community, as it became available.

18. He reaffirmed his Government's unswerving commitment to the safe and peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

19. **Mr. Smagulov** (Kazakhstan) said that, with the end of the current century, issues relating to sustainable development and protection of the environment, as well as the rehabilitation of zones that had suffered environmental disasters, including those that had been contaminated by radiation, had acquired fundamental importance and called for immediate solutions.

20. Problems relating to the negative consequences of atomic radiation had particular importance for Kazakhstan, since for 50 years nuclear weapons had been emplaced and nuclear tests carried out in its territory, particularly at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site. As a result of the nuclear tests carried out at Semipalatinsk over the years, irreversible damage had been caused to that region. Even today many children were born with defects and pathological mutations caused by radiation. The tests had also contaminated the environment over vast areas, including water resources, and had caused a considerable reduction in economic activities in areas close to the nuclear test site.

21. His country was making vigorous efforts to overcome the serious consequences of that nuclear testing. The measures adopted included the closing of the test site. In addition, Kazakhstan was firmly determined to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime. The decision to renounce nuclear weapons and accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was a natural option for a country like Kazakhstan, which had been the direct victim of the prejudicial consequences of nuclear testing.

22. On 5 August 1999, Kazakhstan had become a full member of the Conference on Disarmament. By approving the admission of Kazakhstan to that important disarmament and weapons-control forum, the international community had recognized Kazakhstan's contribution to world disarmament and the strengthening of the regime of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, as well as its contribution to international peace and security. In addition, the General Assembly had adopted two resolutions on the Semipalatinsk region (resolutions 52/169 M of 16 December 1997, and 53/1 H of 16 November 1998). He expressed his Government's appreciation for those resolutions; they demonstrated the importance accorded by the international community to Kazakhstan's efforts to overcome the consequences of nuclear testing.

23. Kazakhstan urged the international community to redouble its efforts to extend financial and technical assistance for the rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region and in order to resolve the humanitarian, economic, social and environmental problems of that area, and it expressed appreciation to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and to the donor countries for the support they had provided to remedy the situation. Kazakhstan was particularly grateful for the efforts made by the Government of Japan and by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with regard to the convening, in early September 1999, of an international conference to consider the problems caused by nuclear testing at the Semipalatinsk site. The assistance from Japan and UNDP had made possible

the implementation of the relevant resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly.

24. In conclusion, Kazakhstan commended the work of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and undertook to continue giving full support to its activities.

25. **The Chairman** announced the conclusion of the general debate on agenda item 86 and drew the attention of Committee members to the draft resolution entitled "Effects of atomic radiation" (A/C.4/54/L.20).

The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.